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C O N F I D E N T I A L STATE 114032

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E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/03/2019
TAGS: PREL UNSC GG
SUBJECT: DEMARCHE ON UN ENGAGEMENT IN GEORGIA AND SRSG
SUCCESSOR

REF: USUN 684

Classified By: IO A/S Esther D. Brimmer for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) THIS IS AN ACTION REQUEST. Department requests that Post, in close coordination with Quad missions in New York, approach UN officials at the appropriate level regarding the continuation of high-level UN leadership on Georgia with the objectives below in mind. Overall, we want to preserve as strong and effective a UN presence in Georgia as possible while keeping in mind the United States' steadfast support for Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty. We understand that Johan Verbeke's service as the United Nations' top representative for Georgia is due to end on December 31, 2009. At a minimum, the United States would like to maintain the rank of Verbeke's current position by avoiding weakening of his title or replacing him with a lower ranking UN official.

OBJECTIVES

¶2. (C) In close coordination with Quad (UK, FR, GE) permanent missions to the UN, the Department requests Post to approach UN officials as soon as possible with the following objectives in mind:

-- Preserve as strong and effective UN presence and engagement in Georgia as possible on security and humanitarian issues without undermining Georgia's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

-- Determine if the UN Secretariat plans to replace Verbeke or allow him to continue simultaneously with his new assignment as Belgian Ambassador to UK.

-- If necessary, seek Secretariat agreement to appoint an appropriate senior-level envoy to replace Verbeke and prevent any further downgrading of the level/status/responsibilities of the position.

-- Seek further UN views on its engagement in Georgia moving forward and request continued updates on its activities.

BACKGROUND

¶3. (C) On October 28, Quad Political Directors (at the DAS level) agreed that Quad missions in New York should approach the UN regarding the imminent completion of UN Representative Johan Verbeke's term and that we should also oppose Russian efforts to end the mandate of a UN special envoy in Georgia.

The Department understands that Verbeke would be available to continue into 2010 despite his assuming the duties of Belgian Ambassador to the UK, but that UN protocol likely prohibits a bilateral Ambassador from taking such a role (Note: clarity from the UN on this latter point would be useful). The Department also understands that Russia wants to see the position downgraded with responsibilities handed over to a lower level UN official.

¶4. (C) Current UN engagement in Georgia includes continued co-chairmanship of the Geneva talks and facilitation of the Joint Incident and Response Mechanism meetings. We believe that these roles should continue. Despite the limited progress that these meetings have produced to date, they do at the very least provide a forum for engagement with the separatists outside of the UN New York. However, given the serious security and humanitarian concerns that continue to exist in Georgia, and the considerable expertise that the UN can offer such as mediation and the facilitation of humanitarian assistance, we also believe that the UN role should be strengthened and expanded if possible. Of particular concern are humanitarian issues, including the safe return of internally displaced persons and humanitarian access to the separatist regions. Thus, while the United States supports the current structure of UN engagement in Georgia, we would like to see its roles expanded to include, for example, the facilitation and support for the establishment of confidence building measures and the reengagement of UNHCR and other specialized agencies to address ongoing humanitarian issues.

¶5. (C) With regard to the upcoming completion of Verbeke's tenure, the U.S. wants to ensure that the position is not eliminated or downgraded. Pursuant to the Secretary-General's letter of September 28, 2009 to the UN Security Council, Verbeke's title changed from the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Georgia to UN Representative. While the practical effects of Verbeke's new title may be negligible, a further downgrade would undermine our desire for Georgia to remain a high priority on the UN's agenda. The U.S. would support Verbeke's extension or a successor of similar international diplomatic stature. We do not support the possible appointment of a "senior UN official," which we see as a demotion (see reftel).

Department Point of Contact

¶6. (U) Please contact IO/UNP K.G. Moore, 202-647-0042 or moorekg@state.gov, for additional background or with questions.

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